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National Intelligence Bulletin

November 5, 1975

CHINA-ANGOLA

Peking appears to be lowering the visibility of its involvement in Angola. Chinese military advisers who had been assisting in training units of Holden Roberto's National Front—the recipient of most Chinese assistance in the past—departed Zaire last week. Peking reportedly has also placed restrictions on Zairian army use of Chinese-supplied artillery to support Front units in Angola.

The moves are probably designed to limit strains in China's regional relations and to forestall potential international embarrassment. Peking's attempt to deliver arms to Jonas Savimbi's National Union—now cooperating with the National Front against the Soviet-backed Popular Movement—resulted in a blow-up this summer with Tanzanian President Nyerere, a long-time supporter of the Popular Movement. Peking may have read recent African speeches at the UN as signs of a growing regional backlash against foreign involvement of any sort in Angola. The Chinese may also feel that pressure is growing for an international peace-keeping or fact-finding effort in Angola, a development that would obviously redound to Peking's disadvantage if it continued highly visible forms of military support to its clients.

Peking, on the other hand, is probably not prepared to abandon the Front or the Union totally, especially since they are now making impressive military gains. Chinese support for both groups has been important in cementing good relations with Zairian President Mobutu and Zambian President Kaunda—backers of the Front and Union, respectively.

China, nevertheless, is probably more than willing to allow other external powers, such as South Africa, to bear more of the burden of direct military assistance to the Front and Union. Whatever Chinese military assistance continues will probably be of the type that can be funneled through African intermediaries and still leave Peking with a plausible case for denying direct involvement in Angola. In this regard, Peking could expand its formal military assistance to Zaire with the understanding that specific categories of equipment—such as small arms and ammunition—be earmarked for Angola. [REDACTED]

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